

became familiar to them. The adventurers were often absent for several years on a single cruise, wintering at some island and eventually, when in luck, returning with their accumulated furs to Kamtschatka or to Okotsk. Very frequently they were shipwrecked, and not one but several cases are known in which, like Behring's crew, the shipwrecked men reconstructed a vessel from the poor debris of that which had been cast away and in it returned to the Siberian coast. But whole crews often sailed never to be heard of again, or to be heard of only by subsequent voyagers as having been massacred by the natives.

The adventurers were both hunters and traders. They engaged themselves in the capture of sea-otters, foxes and other valuable skins and besides obtained them by barter from the natives. Under the guise of rendering these people subsidiary to Russia, they also exacted a tribute of furs from them ; taking as much as they could and giving in return merely a paper receipt to the effect that tribute had been paid for the current year.

Coxe briefly describes the method of trade as follows :—"The Russians have for some years past been accustomed to repair to these islands, [the Aleutians,] in quest of furs, of which they have imposed a tax on the inhabitants. The manner of carrying on this trade is as follows. The Russians go in autumn to Behring's island and there winter ; they then employ themselves in catching the sea-cat, and afterwards the Seivutchka, or Sea-lion. The flesh of the otter is prepared for food and is esteemed very delicate. They carry the skins of these animals to the Eastern islands. Next summer they sail eastward to the Fox Islands ; and again lay their ships up for the winter. They then endeavor to procure, either by persuasion or force, the children of the inhabitants, particularly of the Tookoos, as hostages. This being accomplished, they deliver to the inhabitants fox-traps, and also skins for their boats, for which they expect in return furs and provisions during the winter. After obtaining from them a certain quantity of furs, by way of tax, for which they give quitances ; the Russians pay for the rest in beads, false pearls, goats wool, copper kettles, hatchets, etc. In the spring they get back their traps, and deliver up their hostages. They